

# Eurotunnel: Train Travel Under the Sea

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Ever since their invention, trains have been used as a means of getting around throughout the world. But today more than ever, they're an experience and part of the whole traveling process, rather than just a way of getting from one point to another.

In Canada, the Rocky Mountaineer train is widely regarded as the experience of a lifetime, taking you through stunning mountain ranges. Europe's equivalent is probably the equally famous Orient Express, with the Venice to Simplon route generally regarded as the most breathtaking, taking travellers in unbelievable luxury between such wonderful cities as Venice, Paris, London, Rome and Budapest.

Then there are the trains that are more functional, but still provide a unique experience. Perhaps, amongst those are the likes of the Amtrak Auto Train, which runs from Lorton, Virginia to Sanford, Florida. It's a route that's been used by many people to head down to Walt Disney World and it's probably this principle that most easily explains the idea of the Eurotunnel, which we used on our recent visit to the Disneyland Resort Paris.

The big differences between the Amtrak Auto Train and the Eurotunnel are that, firstly, you're traveling between two different countries on the Eurotunnel, with services running from Folkestone in the southeast of England to Calais on the northern coast of France. That means that everything you see and hear from your arrival at either terminal is in both languages and it also means that you have to pass through security and customs whenever you enter the train. Interestingly, you pass through French passport control in the UK and then technically you're on French soil and exactly the same thing happens at the Calais end.

While the Auto Train runs over land, that's very different to Eurotunnel, whose trains go through the Channel Tunnel that runs underneath the English Channel between England and France. The Channel Tunnel is the longest undersea tunnel in the world, a total of 31 miles long and, at its lowest point, it's over 300 feet below sea level. It's therefore perhaps not surprising that the American Society of Civil Engineers declared it to be one of the seven wonders of the modern world in 1996.

The Channel Tunnel carries Eurostar trains, passenger train services that run from either Ashford or Ebbsfleet in Kent or St. Pancras in London across to Lille and Paris in France or Brussels in Belgium. But that's only one part of the Channel Tunnel story. The other part is what

---

Eurotunnel provides and that has two segments to it.

The first is their freight vehicle service, which carries trucks in semi open rail cars. The truck drivers spend the duration of their time on the train in the first passenger carriage. It's a very different system if you're taking the passenger vehicle service. When you first arrive at the passenger terminal, you're given a letter for your particular service and are asked to wait inside the terminal until your letter is called.

While you wait (on either side of the tunnel), there's a fair bit to keep you busy, with shops and places to eat. On the way to France, we browsed some of the shops and grabbed a light lunch, while on our return, we found a few surprising bargains in the duty free shop at Calais, despite the recent poor performance of the pound against the Euro.

Once your letter is called, you follow the signs and then head through passport control and security. Depending on the day, this can be a very straightforward process or it can take longer. For example, on our return to the UK, we found that there were stringent checks taking place, which meant we had quite a wait to get through this part of the boarding process.

Before you board, unless you're running very close to the actual departure time, you'll be parked up in rows and then each row will be released in order to board the Eurotunnel train. It's a very well run system and is a fair way of doing things. The earlier you get to the parking area, the sooner you'll be boarding the train and that also means you'll be nearer the front of the train when it comes to getting off at the other end.

When they finally direct you to board, you drive on to the train carriage and you could be either upstairs or downstairs. If you're upstairs, there's a ramp in the last carriage to take you up and one in the first carriage to take you back down. We discovered on our most recent trip that it's definitely better to be downstairs, as you don't feel the movement of the train nearly as much, something worth keeping in mind if you are prone to motion sickness. Once you drive on, you're directed forward by a member of staff, who will tell you when to stop, either behind a vehicle or perhaps, if you're at the front of the carriage, in front of the doors that separate each carriage.

Once you're parked up, that's it for the next 35 minutes. You're advised to stay with your car, but you can walk around if you want to, not that there's much to see. The windows in the carriages won't show you anything once you're inside the tunnel and the only facilities you'll be

---

able to use while you're on board are the toilets that can be found in every third carriage.

I must admit that the first time I traveled on the Eurotunnel, I was a bit disappointed at the lack of things to do on board, but to be honest, the journey is so quick that, before you know it, you're at your destination and heading into a different country on a different side of the road, which is always an interesting challenge!

It's certainly a very unique way to travel and every time we take the Eurotunnel, I can't help thinking about all the amazing engineering that went in to creating the Channel Tunnel that you go through. On stormy days, I also can't help but think how grateful I am to be below the seas, rather than on a ferry traversing the sea!

*About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)*

Article last updated: 3/26/2009

View the latest version online at: <http://www.passporter.com/articles/eurotunnel.html>

Copyright by Cheryl Pendry. All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this publication may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act. Resale of this guide is strictly prohibited without the copyright holder's permission. If you purchased this publication from someone other than PassPorter Travel Press, please call 877-929-3273.

View more PassPorter Articles online at <http://www.passporter.com/articles/>

.....